



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
Chief Financial Officer
Assistant Secretary for Administration
Washington, D.C. 20230

APR 25 2019

The Honorable José Serrano
Chairman
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice,
Science and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Serrano:

Enclosed is the U.S. Census Bureau's report on Increasing Number of Partnerships Program Staff, Communication Efforts, and Field Operations. This report was requested in Senate Report 115-275 and pursuant to the Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6).

The report provides a plan that increases the number of partnership program staff, communication efforts, and field operations; an assessment of increasing external partnerships; and the associated costs, and includes an assessment of doubling the number of partnership staff and increasing the number of area census offices to 300. In addition, the report addresses funding to expand targeted communications activities as well as opening local questionnaire assistance centers in hard-to-count communities.

Please contact me at (202) 482-4951 if you have any questions. Thank you for your continued support of the U.S. Department of Commerce and its programs.

Sincerely,

Thomas Gilman
Chief Financial Officer and
Assistant Secretary for Administration

Enclosure

REPORT TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, AND SCIENCE,
ON INCREASING THE NUMBER OF TEMPORARY CENSUS OFFICES AND PARTNERSHIP STAFF TO
SUPPORT THE 2020 CENSUS

April 2019

BACKGROUND

Senate Appropriations Report 115-275:

“The Committee is concerned about the proposed levels for partnership staff and communications efforts for the 2020 Decennial Census. Sufficient partnership and communication activities are essential to build trust in the Census Bureau and to increase response rates. Investing in partnership and communication activities can reduce the overall cost of conducting the 2020 Decennial Census. By helping increase self-response rates, there is a reduced need for additional non-response follow-up. Additionally, the Committee understands that the 2020 Decennial Census plan includes only about half the number of local field offices and Regional Census Centers compared to the 2010 Decennial Census. Therefore, the Committee expects the Bureau to provide a plan that increases the number of partnership program staff, communication efforts, and field operations; an assessment of increasing external partnerships; and the associated costs, within 45 days of enactment. The plan should include an assessment of doubling the number of partnership staff and increasing the number of area census offices to 300. The Bureau is further encouraged to consider working with local service organizations as part of the overall strategy to maximize survey response, especially for homeless and displaced populations in rural areas.”

Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6):

“The agreement reiterates House and Senate language regarding the Bureau's partnership and communications efforts aimed at maximizing self-response to the 2020 Decennial Census. Additionally, the Bureau shall devote funding to expand targeted communications activities as well as to open local questionnaire assistance centers in hard-to-count communities.”

Executive Summary

In response to Congressional requests, this report provides (1) an operational assessment and cost estimate for a plan which increases the number of partnership staff and leverages them to help increase self-response rates among hard-to-count populations, and (2) an assessment of the feasibility of increasing the number of Area Census Offices to 300.

With an increase in staff dedicated to the partnership program we could establish a Mobile Response Initiative. Building on the successes and lessons we learned from previous decennial censuses, in which we used a variety of ways to interact directly with communities in areas of potentially low response rates, the Mobile Response Initiative would increase our visibility in these locations and provide the public a way to immediately answer the census while at the mobile response site. By leveraging our existing partnership staff and working with key local and national partners, we would continue to identify high-priority areas and deploy mobile response sites to increase our on-the-ground visibility in these areas. This would increase staff mobility, allowing us to visit many areas in a single day and adapt our on-the-ground visibility to address unanticipated challenges. To minimize cost and complexity of this initiative, we would extend approximately 5,000 recruiting staff, avoiding the cost of hiring and equipping an entirely new staff to complete this initiative.

For the 2020 Census we only need to open 248 Area Census Offices (ACOs) because of significant improvements in field operations. Due to our reengineering of field operations, which includes streamlining of the office and staffing structure, increased use of technology, and increased productivity from both management and staff, an additional 52 ACOs, which serve primarily as administrative hubs to manage field activities, will not improve our field operations or our ability to address the challenges of the Hard to Count populations. Furthermore, the General Services Administration (GSA) has told us there is insufficient lead time for them to provide additional space to lease ACOs. Therefore, adding additional ACOs at this point is not feasible.

Please note neither the Mobile Response Initiative nor adding additional ACOs are included or funded under current appropriations or budget requests, nor were either assumed in the 2020 Census Life Cycle Cost Estimate released in December 2017.

Congressional Request 1: Operational assessment and cost estimate for a plan which increases the number of partnership staff and leverages them to help increase self-response rates among hard-to-count populations.

Conclusion: Implement a Mobile Response Initiative, adding approximately 5,000 more staff to support and provide questionnaire assistance for Hard to Count Populations in easily accessible physical locations.

Summary

The Partnership Specialist is a professional position which focuses on developing relationships with groups and organizations interested in promoting the 2020 Census. Their focus is on improving the response and participation in the Census within the communities who are least likely to respond – often termed the “Hard to Count” (HTC). These specialists work in local communities and possess unique qualifications depending on the areas where they are assigned to work, including the ability to speak languages other than English common in their neighborhood.

The Partnership Specialist works from home at locations across the Nation and Puerto Rico. The temporary full-time position is classified as a professional (in the GS-7 through GS-12 pay range depending on experience), and reports to one of six Regional Census Centers. Recruiting and hiring is done via the same systems and processes in place for career Federal employees.

The Census Bureau will hire 1,501 Partnership Specialists for the 2020 Census, which is already nearly double the number of partnership specialists who worked during the 2010 Census. As of April 4, 2019, 708 specialists were either working or in the onboarding process (approximately 47 percent of the total planned staffing). The Census Bureau expects that the program will be fully staffed by July 2019.

With an increase in professional staff dedicated to the partnership program, the Bureau would look to leverage the work of external census partners, the Partnership Specialists, and additional staffing resources, to directly help with the enumeration of HTC populations.

The Census Bureau would work with partners to identify locations with prominent visibility where people can go to answer the Census if they believe they have been missed. By deploying paid staff in multiple languages with government-furnished tablets or computers, and leveraging key partnerships, the Census Bureau will target high-traffic locations in neighborhoods with low response rates. People who have not responded to the Census can do so at these locations. This option also is responsive to the language in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019 (P.L. 116-6), relating to Questionnaire Assistance Centers.

In previous Censuses, the Census Bureau used a variety of ways to interact directly with communities in areas of potentially low response rates. Questionnaire Assistance Centers (QACs) have been used in the past to raise awareness of the Census and to motivate

participation by providing assistance to the public on completing the questionnaire they received, answering questions, providing language assistance, and providing a Be Counted (BC) questionnaire when asked. These were placed in “Hard to Count” areas in locations identified by Census partners and were staffed by paid Census employees who were trained to answer questions about the purpose and content of the census questionnaire. Approximately 30,000 Questionnaire Assistance Centers were in place for the 2010 Census; however, most of these sites were only available to the public for a limited number of hours each day, and only open on specific days each week.

Similarly, BC sites were placed in locations throughout the Nation in areas with potentially low response rates. Working with partners, the Census Bureau identified locations where people could retrieve a paper BC questionnaire to complete and mail back to the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau established approximately 10,000 BC only sites (sites not staffed by a QAC representative) for the 2010 Census.

In both 2010 Census programs (QAC and BC), individuals who felt they had been missed had to find a physical location where assistance or blank forms were available and then go to that location when it was available to the public. For the 2010 Census, about 760,000 persons were added to the final Census populations counts from the approximately 780,000 BC questionnaires that were received nationwide – a total of about 20 persons added from each of the almost 39,000 locations.

Building on the recommendation from 2010 to make the BC questionnaires available on the internet as well as embracing the three modes of response available in 2020 - Internet, phone, and mail - we need to update the QAC/BC site model from 2010 to work effectively with the 2020 Census design. The Census Bureau is committed to providing a visible strategy to encourage on-the-ground participation in low response areas, and we believe the Mobile Response Initiative, detailed below, will fit those needs.

Operational Assessment

Following the same model as previous Censuses, the Mobile Response Initiative would increase our visibility in locations which show a low response to the census. Further, with the introduction of an online response option and the ability to process “non-ID” responses, the Census Bureau would be able to provide the public with a way to directly answer the census at these highly visible locations. At markets, festivals, events and other high-traffic venues, the Census Bureau can have staff with tablets or computers available to help people answer the census. This staff would be highly mobile – they can go to multiple areas in a day to generate the greatest awareness and participation.

There are some key improvements over the 2010 approach. Unlike previous censuses – where the key message at these locations was “go home with this blank census form and answer the census” - people can complete their census questionnaire and be done while at the mobile response site. The strategy moves from motivating a response to an actual, direct response.

Also, this mobility would allow the Census Bureau to respond to the emerging dynamics of how the public is participating. We can go to them – not wait for them to come to us.

The focus of this effort would be in areas which are trending towards a low response. Initially, these sites would be staged in locations where we expect a low response using existing analytic tools such as the Response Outreach Area Mapper (ROAM). As we monitor response rates in real time, we would then deploy these in areas where we see lower than expected results. This would allow us to adapt our on-the-ground visibility to address unanticipated challenges. Many key existing partnerships can be leveraged to help provide space in high-traffic, transit accessible, trusted spaces.

- **Purpose:** To establish a visible, official presence in areas with low response to the 2020 Census and provide the public with a way to immediately answer the census in these locations.
- **Responsibility:** Responsibility for this operation would be under the Area Census Offices. Preparation, training, staffing and management of the Mobile Response Initiative would fall under the Recruiting areas. The partnership team would play a significant role in identifying partners and locations.
- **Timing:** Staff would begin work on the initiative in mid-March 2020. After completing training on census concepts, response and language options, and logistics and reporting, staff would begin deploying the Mobile Response Initiative to locations just prior to April 1, 2020. The Mobile Response Initiative would continue through mid-July, with wrap-up actions (return of materials, debriefing, etc.) concluding by the 1st week of August 2020.
- **Staffing:** In the Area Census Offices, up to 4,740 Recruiting Assistants would transition from their recruiting role to supporting the Mobile Response Initiative. Most mobile sites would be covered by a team of two, but this can change based on expected volume. The ACO Recruiting Manager would oversee the approximately 20 Recruiting Assistants who work the Mobile Response Initiative in each ACO. These Recruiting Assistants would be work at home staff, distributed throughout each ACO's area. Clerical support for Recruiting in the ACO would transition to support the Mobile Response Initiative. In the Regional Census Centers, the Recruiting Coordinator and associated recruiting staff would oversee the planning and implementation of the Mobile Response Initiative once recruiting has finished. The partnership staff would identify potential locations for the Mobile Response Initiative in areas where a low response is expected.
- **Logistics:** We would use tablets already provided to the Recruiting Assistants to support the Mobile Response Initiative. Similarly, the tablecloth used for recruiting would also be used. We may need to procure lightweight folding tables and promotional materials for this purpose.
- **The Role of Partnership:** Partnership Specialists would work with Complete Count Committees and other local and national partners to identify locations for the Mobile

Response Initiative. Initially, these would be located in pre-identified areas – such as those with high LRS scores from the ROAM, rural population centers, and others. As census forms are returned, the partnership staff would work with the recruiting staff to identify additional high-priority areas. Partnership staff would reach out to partners in those locations to identify locations and activities to generate high visibility and participation.

Assumptions and Estimated Cost

A key assumption to minimize cost and complexity of the Mobile Response Initiative is to extend the existing recruiting staff. This avoids the cost of hiring and equipping an entirely new staff to complete this initiative. The timing flows nicely into this plan. Recruiting Assistants are scheduled to conclude their work by March 14, 2020. This plan extends their time until the first week of August. They keep their existing equipment and for the most part, the supervisory and support structure remains intact.

The majority of efforts and costs would occur in FY 2020.

ACOs (\$81.5 million):

- Extending the NTE for 248 Recruiting Managers from 7/31/2020 to 8/31/2020
- Extending the NTE for 4,740 Recruiting Assistants from 3/14/2020 to 8/8/2020
- Extending the NTE for 248 Office Operations Supervisors from 4/15/2020 to 8/14/2020
- Extending the NTE for 496 clerks from 4/15/2020 to 8/7/2020

RCCs (\$0.3 million):

- Extending the NTE for 12 Recruiters from 8/31/2020 to 9/30/2020

Additional Expenses (\$8.7 million):

- Supplies/Materials
- IT equipment
- Training and Materials Prep:

Total Estimated Cost - \$90.5 million

Please note neither the Mobile Response Initiative nor adding additional ACOs are included or funded under current appropriations (FY2018 and FY2019) or budget requests (FY2020), nor were either assumed in the 2020 Census Life Cycle Cost Estimate released in December 2017.

Congressional Request 2: Assessment of the feasibility of increasing the number of Area Census Offices to 300.

Conclusion: We believe this option is not feasible given the operational lead times required to lease space and outfit locations.

Summary

For the 2010 Census, we opened nearly 500 Local Census Offices (LCOs) to support and manage data collection operations completed by field enumerators. LCOs handled the daily administration such as hiring, auditing work, and entering employee hours and payroll. For the 2020 Census, we will be leveraging technology to significantly streamline and optimize our field operations. Field staff will be using laptops and smartphones to conduct their field work, work assignments will be optimized and electronically transmitted daily, paperless payroll will be automated, and supervisors will be able to remotely manage staff via enhanced reporting tools. Census takers will no longer need to report to an office, or supervisor, to receive and turn in their case assignments or their time sheets. These innovations will allow us to reduce our brick and mortar footprint and substantially improve the productivity of our data collection efforts. For the 2020 Census we will only need to open 248 Area Census Offices (ACOs) because of these significant improvements in field operations.

Operational Assessment

We would need to add 52 Area Census Offices to reach the 300 outlined in the Committee's request. At this point in the procurement cycle, adding additional Area Census Offices, less than 12 months prior to Census Day 2020, is not feasible. The General Services Administration (GSA) has told us there is insufficient lead time for them to provide additional ACOs. Because of the size and security requirements of these offices, GSA requires a minimum of 18 months to procure space to lease Area Census Offices. In order for us to adequately incorporate additional ACOs into our process for the 2020 Census, we would need the additional 52 leases executed no later than August 2019, which allows us time to perform space modifications and build-out, deliver furniture, and install/connect IT equipment to conduct peak census operations that begin in January 2020. There is simply not enough time for GSA to complete the process in time for census operations.

Adding an additional 52 ACOs would also result in significant challenges related to retooling our systems and processes and redefining our geographic operations. Our plan for the 2020 Census relies heavily on the integration of 52 automated systems across 35 operations. Essential to the design of these systems is the structure of information technology and field operations around 248 offices. Our processes to track and distribute information about the status of questionnaire response is based on a structure with 248 offices. Further, our personnel systems, including pay rates and hiring processes, are built around 248 offices. We are concerned that "retooling" these systems to adjust for a different number than 248 offices will introduce significant risk that could jeopardize the successful completion of field operations. Further, it is likely to

redirect resources away from finalizing systems and incorporating lessons learned from the 2018 Census Test.

We do not believe the addition of 52 ACOs – which serve primarily as administrative hubs to manage field activities – will enhance our ability to address the challenges of the Hard to Count populations. Our process to identify and locate the 248 ACOs is essentially finished and our plan to conduct the field operations from these offices is already in motion. Altering this plan could detract from our efforts to address Hard to Count issues because we would need to move resources away from implementation into procuring additional space and making significant adjustments to the plan. This plan has already been vetted and validated by a number of external stakeholders, including oversight. It should also be noted that during the 2010 Census, the LCOs did not provide direct visibility in Hard-to-Count areas, nor would they have been appropriate to serve as QACs or Be Counted sites, and the same is true for the 2020 Census design.

Estimated Cost

At this point in the decade, we believe this option is not feasible given the operational lead times required to lease space and outfit locations. Thus, we did not prepare a cost estimate.